As it expanded, Chinese civilization took to itself many elements of the peoples with whom it came in contact. By the close of the Chou, and probably much earlier, the culture of the Chinese, like that of many other peoples, was becoming a synthesis of contributions from many regions, north, south, and west of the primitive seat of civilization. For instance, in the later centuries of the Chou and down into the Ch'in dynasty there are evidences of so-called "Scythian" influence on art objects, including bronzes. From the eighth to the third century B.C. the Scyths were in control in much of what is now Russia and the effect of their art on that of China argues either direct or indirect contacts of the Chinese with the peoples of the vast plain which stretches across much of Europe and Asia.

As has been said, it is not a simple matter to determine the earliest culture of the Chinese. Our written documents are comparatively few, and their dates, the purity of their present texts, and even the authenticity of numerous sections are so open to question that many of the conclusions drawn from them are disputable. As is natural, the further back we go the more open to debate our findings become. Archeological researches into this period are still, as we have said, so decidedly in their infancy that most of the deductions drawn from them must for the present be very tentative. Much of what is given below is, accordingly, conjectural and may have to be altered or even discarded as knowledge of the period advances. This is especially true of the picture of economic and social life given in the succeeding paragraphs.

In the early years of the Chou dynasty, Chinese culture, it will be recalled, was already advanced. As before, the basic industry was agriculture. Millet, rice, wheat, and barley were the chief cereals. Some of these were quite possibly of foreign origin. The ox-drawn plow appeared, possibly of alien provenance. Fermented liquor was made from both rice and millet. Vegetables were raised and fruits were cultivated. The mulberry was particularly useful, because its leaves nourished the silk-worms and so were essential in the production of the most characteristic oi Chinese textiles. Several kinds of plants were employed in the